

James Cihlar

Cold Flat Sweet

I want to show you
the empty café
on Broadway, Council Bluffs,
Iowa, where my mother
took me when I was five,
before divorce, before trips to bars
where she would buy me
Coke after Coke after Coke
whose bubbles clung, rose, burst.
But what does it matter?
All that matters is the café,
empty but for me, my mother,
and the waitress. Look at
a square room with glass walls,
the perfect square of a gray tabletop
locked in the center of
the grid of linoleum:
square within squares within square,
slanted bolts of sunlight
propped against windows,
the clean circle
of the glass's rim,
the clear cylinder containing
opaque chocolate milk—
a transparent parabola of brown
where the action of raising the glass
has sloshed milk up the sides—
fixed by the glass, not unlike
your thumb and index finger
wound through the coffee cup's handle.